



Exera Quarterly Trend Analysis

Safety & security trends and forecasts for Myanmar

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Executive Summary

Peace & Stability. Fighting in Rakhine Shan and Chin State's Paletwa continues to escalate and is arguably the most intense it's been in recent years. It is unlikely the frequency and intensity of conflict can be sustained in the third quarter, with heavy rains limiting movement of combatants in rural areas. The peace process saw little change again in Q2. The Tatmadaw and government continue to cling to what appears to be an already defunct NCA peace process, while powerful ethnic armed organizations have already moved on to find an alternative path to peace that grants them a fairer deal. Prospects for reviving the stalled peace progress are only worsened by the intensifying conflict in Rakhine State.

Civil Unrest. Q2 saw a significant increase in overall number of demonstrations and attendees mostly in protest marches organized by the USDP members and nationalists and attended by the individuals who claimed themselves as nationalist activists, nationalist Buddhist monks and USDP members. The key reason for the protests were against the government's decision of amending the child right's bill and against amending clause 59 (f) of the 2008 Constitution which bars the State Counsellor Aung San Su Kyi from presidency and condemning the government for prosecuting monk U Wirathu under Article 124 (a).

Crime. This quarter reporting of drug-related and sexual assault crimes, both in Yangon and nationally, showed a significant increase. This was in contrast to other crimes against the person, such as murder, and property crimes, such as thefts. It is assessed that the increase in reporting is likely a result of more active policing towards drug-related crimes. Assaults and homicide have remained moderately unchanged, with quarterly fluctuations that do not appear to indicate either an overall increase or decrease.

Health & Hazards. Road Traffic Accidents (RTAs) continue to be the most significant health, safety and environmental hazard by frequency and impact, according to media-reported incidents. Fire were the second most common hazard. Noticeable incidents for Q2 of the year includes the outbreak of Dengue fever and H1N1 victims. Since the last quarter, reporting of RTAs has slightly decreased, while reporting of weather-related hazards has increased and is likely to continue to do so with the monsoon season in Q3.

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Peace and Stability

Trends Overview

The peace process saw little change again in this quarter. The Tatmadaw and government continue to cling to what appears to be an already defunct NCA peace process, while powerful ethnic armed organizations have already moved on to find an alternative path to peace that grants them a fairer deal. Considering the Tatmadaw's long standing hardline attitude and heavy handed approach towards ethnic groups, it is no surprise that they are not getting the cooperation needed. Prospects for reviving the stalled peace progress are only worsened by the intensifying conflict in Rakhine state. The collateral damage on civilians has only fueled animosity towards the Tatmadaw and increased the desire to fight rather than talk peace. The Tatmadaw was also unable to maintain its unilateral ceasefire zone battle-free in its sixth month, claiming the TNLA trespassed out of their zone. The military's confidence in dealing with EAOs with arms contradicts the very nature of peace negotiations.

Armed conflict & Peace process

The NLD government has instructed the Tatmadaw to use necessary force and combat helicopters, but also to be highly wary of human rights issues in Rakhine State. However, the Tatmadaw continues to use their four cuts policy, cutting information, cutting food supplies, cutting funds and cutting heads or support. The internet shutdown in 8 Rakhine Townships and 1 Chin Township amid credible reports of Tatmadaw's operations in affected areas of Rakhine and Chin State. Rakhine State parliament has called for resumption of internet on 24 June, while the UN, US and civil society groups also condemned the internet shutdown.

There were 53 times of clashes between Tatmadaw and EAOs within the period of Tatmadaw's unilateral four month ceasefire (21 December 2018 – 30 April 2019). Office of the Commander-in-Chief announced RCSS and TNLA/SSPP clashed for 45 times. Tatmadaw also claimed they mostly clashed with KIA in April and six KIA members and 7 TNLA members surrender their weapons to the Tatmadaw, but both groups denied.

The meeting in Northern Shan State's Muse between Northern Alliance members and government's NRPC on 30 April resulted in the extension of Tatmadaw's unilateral ceasefire for two more months. According to the Commander-in-Chief's statement, the ceasefire was extended at the request of the KIA and the MNDAA and the TNLA to proceed with the peace making till they can sign the NCA, not mentioning of the AA at all. However, the ULA, the AA's political wing attended the 30 April meeting. KIA, TNLA and MNDAA requested the Tatmadaw to halt excluding Rakhine State in the ceasefire and to stop launching major offensives against the AA or they will stand together with AA.

The Tatmadaw has been sending troop reinforcements to launch military offensives in northern Rakhine State and Chin State's Paletwa Township, according to the AA. Nearly 1,000 troops from LID 77 from Northern Shan State's TNLA active areas were sent to Southern Chin State, Paletwa Township on 21 April as reinforcements to LID 22 and 55 in Rakhine State. On 27 April, the Tatmadaw fired its powerful Multiple Rocket Launcher

System at AA positions between Buthidaung and Rathedaung townships. It is most likely that this may be the first time the Tamadaw has used this type of weapon in active combat.

The number of IDPs reached at least 45,000 as of 30 June. 275 Rakhine based CSOs and Rakhine State Minister of Municipal Affairs urged to solve the deteriorate situations of IDPs directly to the Tatmadaw and AA. With limited access to helps, INGOs also warned the basic needs of IDPs are not meeting. At the same time, the Tatmadaw announced that they occupied a temporary AA camp in Mrauk-U and found food supplies with WFP logo.

The ARSA also reappeared with ambush against a Police vehicle in Maungdaw Township on 22 April. Accusations from Tatmadaw over AA of having connection with not only ARSA but also with IS were in April.

Despite Tatmadaw's extension of its unilateral ceasefire by another two months on 30 April, the conflict in Rakhine State sees no sign of lessening in May and June. As Tatmadaw poured in more troops into Rakhine State, AA accordingly fought back. There are more than seven infantry divisions or seventy battalions in Rakhine and southern Chin States as of June 2019. Tatmadaw is also refusing to recognize AA's presence in Rakhine State, labelling them as KIA's foster son, who should stay only in Laiza, KIA HQ.

Meanwhile, the long-awaited PPST summit failed to break out of the deadlock and kickstart the peace process as smaller groups dominated in the gathering while the government Peace Commission stayed inactive, apparently waiting for Tatmadaw's initiative. Prospects to advance the peace process remain desolate for the seventh month since the start of the deadlock.

SSPP and RCSS signed a formal ceasefire on 11 May, after years of fighting prompted by RCSS troops expanding into Northern Shan State. Despite mediation by Shan political parties, communities, respected personages, monks and CSOs, only the highly revered Mong Phone Abbot's arbitration achieved peace between them. As long-established SSPP territories in Northern and central Shan State could not be ceded easily to newcomers, the two Shan groups have to work out a political solution as well to forge unity and eventual merger to make sustainable peace. On 14 May, TNLA also offered peace talks with RCSS who responded positively.

Another positive development is disengagement between KNU and NMSP troops in the disputed area of Three Pagodas Pass region on 5 May after reaching an agreement on 3 May. The agreement contained three points: troops from both sides to withdraw from areas of military tension; NMSP to stop logging temporarily in the said areas; both sides to give advanced warning when travelling to other side. However, it could turn out to be another respite in the long-running intermittent tensions between the two neighboring EAOs that began in 1988, as there have been many failed attempts to reconcile by NDF, DAB and UNFC alliances in thirty years.

Landmines and stray bullets from battles remain a big problem for civilians in all ethnic areas, ceasefire or not. The most violations of human rights occurred naturally in Rakhine State where thousands of Tatmadaw troops are battling thousands of AA forces who have won over the Rakhine people for its cause for Rakhine self-determination, thus complicating the situation by mingling of Rakhine combatants among Rakhine villagers.

There are no formal peace meetings in May, with only KNU and KNPP informal meetings with Tatmadaw and NRPC. KNPP's meeting was wrought with the General Aung San statue issue but agreed to hold regular monthly talks with the NRPC.

Peace process and all related work such as UPDJC and JMCs remain stalled since October 2018. The main obstacles as considered by EAOs--non-secession and one army--are still in force as Tatmadaw did not budge from its stand while NLD Government and PC looked away, probably to avoid offending the Tatmadaw.

The most important meeting in May is the PPST summit held in Chiang Mai, Thailand, from 14 to 18 May, where ten NCA-signatory EAOs sought ways to continue the peace process with the government and Tatmadaw but failed to solve the deadlock. KNU proposal to turn PPST into PPCM failed as most members want to keep the status quo, thinking the Tatmadaw would favor PPST rather than PPCM and appear to hope the Tatmadaw will change its stance. However, apart from KNU's proposal to include non-signatories, no other alternative plan was advanced.

Northern Alliance members and NRPC/Tatmadaw meeting scheduled on 24-25 May postponed due to location disagreement; Northern Alliance proposed Pangsang, Mongla, Muse; NRPC proposed Naypyidaw, Myitkyina, Yangon, Mandalay, Lashio or Kengtung. Tatmadaw asserted that it would recognize only Laiza as AA base. However, Government spokesperson Zaw Htay asserted the government was ready to sign ceasefire agreements with four Northern Alliance members individually on 31 May.

Civil Unrest

Trends overview

Q2 saw a significant increase in overall number of demonstrations and attendees mostly in rallies and protest marches organized by the USDP members and nationalists and attended by the individuals who claimed themselves as nationalist activists, nationalist Buddhist monks and USDP members. The key reason for the protests were against the government's decision of amending the child right's bill and to protect clause 59 (f) of the 2008 Constitution which bars the State Counsellor Aung San Su Kyi from presidency and condemning the government for prosecuting monk U Wirathu under Article 124 (a).

Rallies in support of the Constitutional amendment committee were widely seen in several towns in this quarter also. The overall number of demonstrations and attendees in Q2 is significantly increase compared Q1.

Many Q2 demonstrations rallied in support of the ruling NLD party's efforts to amend the military-drafted 2008 Constitution by forming a joint-committee in the parliament. Most pro-reform rallies were organized by the NLD supporters and former 88 Generation students.

Constitutional reform rally in Yangon turns violent

A public gathering to support the ruling NLD party in its efforts to amend the constitution turned into a confrontation between pro-democracy activists and a group of people, including Buddhist monks, claiming themselves as nationalists before police manage to calm the situation. On 7 April, NLD supporters organized, with authorities' approval, a rally in Thu Mingalar Park (South Okkalapa Township, Yangon) to support NLD-led effort to amend the 2008 military drafted constitution. Among those expected to give a speech were two activists notorious for their strong stance against Buddhist-Bamar radicalism: Nay Myo Zin and Htin Lin Oo.

The speeches were set to begin at 1500 but a group of nationalist monks and around 40 of their supporters arrived on the scene to protest the presence of Nay Myo Zin and Htin Lin Oo among the speakers. Pro amendment demonstrators started to shout, "We don't want Ma Ba Ta" referring to the hardline Bamar-Buddhist nationalist movement they assumed these monk and their supports were the members of. As policemen and township administrators deployed at the park to monitor the event tried to mediate between both groups, a pro-amendments supporter took off his pants in front of a group of women nationalist protesters, thus triggering a violent confrontation between both groups. Additional dozens of policemen were sent as reinforcement and managed to separate both groups. Speakers were able to continue their speech.

During his speech, Nay Myo Zin invited the leading nationalist monk to come on stage and discuss what they considered to be an insult on the Tatmadaw and religion. In his speech, Nay Myo Zin raised questions over about military's budget plan, government transparency and public tax. That was the 24th gathering over constitutional amendment committee nationwide.

This event highlights the shortcoming of Myanmar Police Force in term of anticipating potential confrontation. Especially as every pro-amendment rallies have been often met with violent counterdemonstration organized by radical nationalists.

However, the local police have shown real determination by keeping antagonist separated, trying to negotiate with leaders from both groups and managed to summon up relatively quickly to allow the event to continue without using excessive force.

Incidents of interest

On 19 May, nearly 300 people including political activists and civil society organizations staged a demonstration in Yangon requesting immediate suspension of coal-fired cement plant named “Alpha” in Aungthapyay village in Patheingyi Township of Mandalay Division and for the release of those villagers who were arrested during police crackdown. After the speeches, police detained at least three people who were believed to be leading the protest.

On 15 May, police forces launched a crackdown on a protest camp in Aungthapyay village where locals were demanding the permanent suspension of the coal-fire cement plant. Police used rubber bullets and tear gas injuring 18 villagers. Three villagers were detained and cases were opened against 14 villagers. A reporter from the Channel Mandalay TV was also arrested for livestreaming the crackdown on social media. Lashio

On 19 May, more than 10,000 people marched in Lashio, Shan State, to support the Tatmadaw and its role in the politics of Myanmar. Members of War Veteran Organization, Buddhist monks and groups of ethnic villagers participated in the rally, which started in front of Lashio City Hall and ended with speeches from former USDP representative of the parliament ‘Bullet’ Hla Swe. The speeches were about protecting section 59(f) of the constitution and approval of the amendment of section 261. Protesters also condemned United Nations and ASEAN Parliamentarians for Human Rights’ accusations of mass human rights violations by the Tatmadaw. Section 59(f) of the Myanmar Constitution states that a presidential candidate must be a citizen, be born of both parents who are both Myanmar citizens, and cannot have a foreign spouse or children. It is considered to be directly aimed at Aung San Suu Kyi. Section 261 of the constitution enacted in 2008 is related to the appointment of region and chief ministers. A USDP lawmaker submitted the bill to the parliament and if approved, the amendment would see the chief ministers of states and regions elected by local parliaments, instead of being appointed by the president. Senior General Min Aung Hlaing has praised nationalist protestors who took to the streets in a show of defiance against international condemnation of the military. In a speech at the Myanmar War Veteran Association (MWVA) in Naypyitaw in November 2018, Min Aung Hlaing said the nationwide rallies showed that the Tatmadaw and the people are on the same side.

On 19 May, Civil Society Organizations, Buddhist monks and Arkanese people staged protests in Sittwe, Pauktaw, Maungdaw and Ponnagyun townships to demand cease-fire, aids for people affected by the conflict and the return of displaced people to their homes. These protests follow a petition sent on 9 May by residents of Sittwe, CSOs and Buddhist monks asking the government to act on four subjects:

1. To declare cease-fire in Rakhine State and solve problems by political means.
2. For the IDPs to return home as the monsoon season approaches.
3. To lift travel restrictions for local and international aid groups, so that IDPs can get proper help.
4. To reduce civilian casualties caused by Tatmadaw. According to the Arakan Army Information Department, 30 civilians were killed, at least 80 sustained injuries and more than 38,000 people are displaced by the fighting between Tatmadaw and AA in Rakhine.

The multiplicity of demonstrations across Myanmar reflect a growing civil society willing to show their support for their ideas, from the pro-Tatmadaw nationalist to pro-reformist NLD supporters, and land right activists to anti-war movement. While most of these protests ended peacefully, the police reaction at Aungthapyay village shows that under certain circumstances, the Myanmar Police Force is still willing to use disproportionate use of force on civilian demonstrators. Clients are advised to avoid protests, irrespective of their nature, as confrontations between two opposite sides or violent reactions of the police are possible.

On 14 and 15 May, three temporary Muslim prayer sites in South Dagon were forced to shut down by a group of at least 100 alleged Buddhist nationalists wielding long swords and wooden sticks. As there are no mosques in South Dagon Township, local Muslim residents petitioned the township administration for the permission to use three Muslims owned buildings as temporary praying sites for the duration of Ramadan. According to the South Dagon township officials, Yangon regional government designated on 8 May three buildings in Quarter No. 26, 64 and 106 as temporary praying sites from 6 May to 7 June. On 14 May, according to an anonymous officer from the general administration office, the nationalists gathered in front of the Quarter No.26's prayer hall and requested for its closure. On 15 May, nationalists went to the two remaining sites with the same request. Witnesses present at the scene claimed that nationalists entered the prayer sites using force, took pictures and conducted a thorough search of the premises, this without any intervention of the Police. Nationalists also forcibly made Muslims sign a pledge at the township office that they would not pray at those places any longer. On 17 May, the General Administration Department (GAD) in Yangon's South Dagon Township has filed lawsuits against nationalist leaders, Michael Kyaw Myint and one accomplice who spearheaded these protests.

Forecast

The issue of “protecting clause 59(f) of the constitution and protecting race and religion” will continue to be a major cause of protest for the coming quarter and may be a driver for increased nationalistic sentiment. Pro-Tatmadaw protests in the past—particularly following the height of the violence in Rakhine in 2017—have drawn large crowds, with people from outside of Yangon being bussed in to demonstrate. Despite the size of the rallies, they are likely to remain peaceful. However international clients should remain aware of the ongoing tensions and prepare for the possibility of hostility.

A further source of protest in Q3 may be the stalled Myitsone dam project. With rumours that plans for the Chinese-backed infrastructure project have resumed, local communities are likely to voice strong opposition to the project.

Crime

Trends overview

Official crime statistics, as reported by the Yangon police, continue to indicate a steady rise in major categories of crime including homicide, theft, and drug-related crimes. Divergent from previous quarters, there was a decrease police reporting of sexual assaults this quarter after a consistent rise since Exera began tracking data in 2015. Conversely, reports of underage sexual violence in the mainstream and social media continued to rise.

Drug-related crimes

Police reporting of drug-related crime in Yangon has been steadily increasing and continued to do so this quarter. Between Q1 and Q2 the incidents of drug-related crime increased by 13 percent; however the increase compared to the 12-month average lied just below five percent.

Though official reports of drug crimes increased, there was a decrease in publicly reported crime, likely as a result of diminished national interest rather than a decrease in number of incidents. During Q1 and Q2 of 2018, major changes to the national drug policy were announced, which likely contributed to more media coverage of drug-related crime at the time. Despite a shift in policy—focusing less on seizures and arrests and more on harm and supply reduction—there has not yet been a decrease in official reports of drug crime.

Sexual Assault

Police reporting of sexual assault decreased by 23 percent between Q1 and Q2 and was down 20 percent compared to the 12-month average. This could be the result of reporting fatigue—after an initial period of increased reporting following major international and national campaigns, the spotlight has shifted, to some extent, away from the issue leading to fewer reports. Regardless, the frequency of sexual assaults is likely much higher than statistics captured by either police or media reports.

Theft

Both police and media reports suggest an upward trend in overall thefts and robberies. Between Q1 and Q2, police reports indicate a 14 percent increase in thefts and robberies and in Q2 compared to the 12-month average there was a 25 percent increase in thefts and robberies.

Homicide

Official reports of homicide have remained relatively consistent since Exera began tracking statistics in 2015 with slight deviations between quarters. However the increase in media reporting on homicides may be a result of increased access to information, rather than an indication of an increase in the number of homicides. In most cases, homicides are committed by a person known to the victim and random acts of homicidal violence are uncommon.

Forecast

Crime in three of the four major categories—sexual assault, theft, drugs—will likely continue to rise, particularly in urban areas such as Yangon, Mandalay and Taunggyi. Further, as access to weapons, including guns, increases, crimes are likely to become more violent in nature. However, relative to cities with populations of similar size, rates of violent crime remain low. Crimes against international remains low, and are most commonly crimes of opportunity rather than targeted attacks.

Hazards

Trends overview

Road Traffic Accidents (RTAs) continue to be the most significant health, safety and environmental hazard by frequency and impact, according to media-reported incidents. Fire were the second most common hazard. Noticeable incidents for Q2 of the year includes the outbreak of Dengue fever and H1N1 victims. Since the last quarter, reporting of RTAs has slightly decreased, while reporting of weather-related hazards has increased and is likely to continue to do so with the monsoon season in Q3.

The dry season frequently sees an increase in fire-related incidents as well as an increase in construction and industrial accidents. Though Q1 saw a high number of severe weather and strong winds in Sagaing, Kachin and Magway, destroying properties but no report of casualties.

Road Traffic Accidents (RTAs)

The number of police reported Road Traffic Accidents (RTA) increased between Q1 and Q2 by 16 percent and was 11 percent lower than the 12-month average. The trend for the past three years has been a decrease in reported RTAs during Q2 (compared to the yearly average) presumably as roads become slippery and driving conditions worsens with the start of the monsoon season. Similarly, the number of injuries has also increased by 21 percent compared to the yearly average. The number of deaths has remained consistent.

According to police reporting, there's an average of seven RTAs per day on the Yangon-Mandalay highway (and an estimated 20,000 road users per day). While exact figures are difficult to verify, traffic police say the number of accidents has drastically declined since the seatbelt law was enacted in June 2017—six months before they became mandatory in Yangon.

Ultimately, Myanmar still stands to be the second deadliest country for traffic accidents in Southeast Asia (after Thailand). Motor vehicle accidents remain the greatest single safety threat in Yangon.

Dengue Outbreak and H1N1 Victims

Public Health Department has reported 3,144 dengue fever cases since the beginning of the year, including 12 deaths, with Yangon, Mandalay, Ayeyarwady, Mon and Tanintharyi regions affected the most. In Yangon, 734 patients have been diagnosed since January, with 8 dead. In Ayeyarwady region, 394 residents have contracted dengue fever over the same period. Several other areas have been affected by dengue, including a sudden outbreak of 394 people in Tanintharyi region. In Mandalay, 234 patients have been diagnosed with dengue fever. Several health experts are warning that these levels are higher than normal, and may exceed the levels of 2015 outbreak. In 2015, there were 7,043 dengue fever cases, causing 28 deaths. Last year, there were over 3,500 dengue cases countrywide.

This outbreak has been reported as higher than normal seasonal outbreaks, and has penetrated into more urbanized regions such as Yangon. As this is only the beginning of the monsoon season, it is anticipated that the pace of infection will accelerate, and exceed the capacity of local health care systems outside of heavily urbanized regions.

According to the Ministry of Health and Sports, at least 40 people have died from H1N1 influenza and 270 people are being treated at government hospitals nationwide as of 30 June 2019. According to the Public Health Department's Central Epidemiology Unit, the deaths this year include 35 of the 169 suspected cases at government hospitals in Yangon Region, Ayeyarwady Region, Magway Region, Sagaing Region, Kayah Region, Bago Region and Kachin State.

Forecast

As the monsoon rains begin, many weather-related events, such as flooding, landslides and to some extent RTAs, are expected. Similarly, Q3 often sees an increase in construction-related accidents as safety precautions are limited to non-existent at many sites.

As cyclone season generally occurring for a month immediately before and after the monsoon season approaches, the number of weather and environment-related incidents will likely increase. Areas most likely to be impacted are coastal regions as many of the storms impacting Myanmar arise out of the Bay of Bengal. In the event of a large storm, monitor Exera flash alerts and follow your in-country safety and security protocols.

Abbreviations and Commonly Used Terms

AA	The Arakan Army is the militant outfit of the ULA (United League of Arakan). Created in 2009 by Major General Tunn Myat Naing, the AA has grown into a force of about 7,000 soldiers benefiting from a solid support by the Arakanese Population.
RCSS	Restoration Council of Shan State. Is a 10,000 strong armed group based on the Thai border. Founded in 1996, RCSS joined the national cease-fire with central government in 2015 and subsequently started to move northward to the Chinese border where it has clashed regularly with other armed groups operating the region.
MNDAA	Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army is a communist-inspired army insurgent group in the Kokang region in the northern Shan State. The army has existed since 1989, having been the first one to sign a ceasefire with the Myanmar government that lasted for about two decades.
KIO/KIA	KIO/KIA Kachin Independence Organization/Kachin Independence Army. Created in 1961, the KIO/KIA claims to represent the struggle of the Kachin population for self-determination. KIA fields more than 10,000 soldiers operating in 10 different brigades throughout Kachin and Shan States as well as Sagaing Division.
NRPC	National Reconciliation and Peace Center. The governmental department in charge of negotiating with various Ethnic Armed Groups on the implementation of a peace agreement chaired by Aung San Su Kyi.
SSPP/SSA	Shan State Progressive Party/ Shan State Army, founded in 1964, the SSPP and its armed wing the SSA is a 8000 strong armed group operating in Northern Shan State. SSPP is regarded as the historically political and military group acting on behalf of the Shan population.
TNLA	Ta'ang National Liberation Army is the armed wing of the Palaung State Liberation Front group claiming more autonomy for the Ta'ang regions. Created in 2009, the TNLA now fields more 7,000 soldiers across Ta'ang populated regions of Northern Shan State.
NCA	Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement
NLD	The National League for Democracy is a social-democratic and liberal democratic political party in Myanmar, currently serving as the governing party.
Northern Alliance	The Northern Alliance is a military coalition composed of four ethnic insurgent groups: AA, KIA, MNDAA and TNLA

Tatmadaw	The Tatmadaw is the official name of the armed forces of Myanmar. It is administered by the Ministry of Defence and composed of the Army, the Navy and the Air Force.
UN	United Nations: Agencies, Funds and Programmes
EAO	Ethnic Armed Organizations